

Behavior-Based Interviewing

CASCADE CAREER SERVICES, PORTLAND, OR

While there is still merit in preparing responses to that "magic list" of the 50 most frequently asked interview questions, more and more employers are beginning to utilize an interview technique called behavior-based interviewing (BBI) as the preferred way to assess the qualifications of job candidates. Simply put, BBI encourages applicants to describe situations in which they have utilized skills and abilities similar to those required in the job for which they are applying.

BBI is based upon a simple premise: *past performance is the best predictor of future performance*. If a candidate has successfully utilized a particular skill in the past, chances are s/he will do so in the future. Furthermore, the more recent and frequent the behavior, the greater the predictor of success. The *goal* for the employer is to bring into the organization new hires who have not only the knowledge and skills required for the job, but also the personal and performance attributes needed to succeed within the particular culture of the organization. Both the recruiter and the candidate need to *prepare* well, and then *perform* well to get the most of a behavior-based interview.

The APPROACH

Unlike a formula interview with standardized questions, BBI allows the person conducting the interview to adapt questions to the applicant and the situation. There are no predictable questions; rather the recruiter must keep in mind the skills and traits s/he is looking for and find a way to encourage the applicant to provide examples. The candidate is evaluated based on past performance. The interviewer asks questions targeted at the behavior needed for the position. The questions will be about particular situations or experiences s/he has had. However, it is unlikely that the interviewer will ask about a specific behavior or quality directly. The applicant needs to use listening skills to identify the recruiter's concern and address this in his/her response. All answers must be substantiated with proof; examples come from almost any life experience current or previous employment, internships, volunteer activities, class projects, involvement with organizations, hobbies/leisure time, even family life. Whatever the interviewee chooses, success depends upon two components:

1. Articulating examples that best illustrate what they can do for an employer.
2. Telling stories with a beginning, middle, and end. Candidates must identify the problem or task they were responsible for, tell what they did, and describe the results.

Essentially, a complete answer to a behavior-based question has three parts:

Situation - What was the situation the applicant was facing?

Behavior - Specifically what did the applicant do or say?

Outcome - What was the result of the applicant's behavior?

The candidates who do best under these conditions are those who have anticipated the questions (or at least the topics) and have *prepared* and *practiced* their responses. Through asking probing questions and listening attentively to candidates' behavior descriptions, employers can find out a person's level of competency as it relates to the job under consideration. The result is a composite picture of the candidate's performance abilities that allows a valid comparison with other candidates competing for the job.

The following are examples of BBI questions that focus on 10 performance attributes that employers frequently try to assess during an interview. Other attributes include: critical thinking, quick study, creativity, proactive approach, goal setting/achieving, commitment to task, organization and planning, thoroughness, and dealing with ambiguity, assertiveness, team building, and interpersonal flexibility.

- Last, take your time to think of an example. If you do not have an example of an appropriate situation, think about the agenda behind the question and answer how you would handle the situation or a similar one.

BEHAVIOR - BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Problem Solving

When was the last time you solved a difficult problem that would have significant impact? What was the situation? How did you go about analyzing the problem? What additional information did you gather? What alternative solutions did you consider? Tell me how you implemented your solution. What was the outcome?

Decision Making

What was the most difficult decision you have made in the last six months? What was the situation? What made it difficult? What factors or variables did you consider? What did you decide? What was the result?

Initiative

Describe your best example of taking the initiative to do something that needed to be done, even though it wasn't really your responsibility. What was the situation? What circumstances required you to act? What actions did you take? What impact did your initiative have on the situation?

Achievement /Drive

Describe a situation in which you believe you were effective in achieving an aggressive goal. What caused you to work hard to meet this objective? What methods or skills did you use to meet your goal? What were the results? What feedback did you receive?

Handling Details

Tell me about the most significant project you have worked on in which it was crucial to keep track of details while still managing the "big picture." What was the project? What skills did you utilize in managing it? How did you make sure the work got done? How did you keep focused on the overall goal of the project while still managing all of the specific parts? How did the project turn out? What feedback did you receive on your management of the task?

Oral Communication

Describe a time when you had great difficulty communicating your thoughts clearly to another person or group. What was the situation? What message were you trying to convey? Where did the difficulty in communicating effectively lay? What did you do to get your point across more clearly? What was the outcome?

Conflict Management

Tell me about a time when you voiced a concern or disagreement to a co-worker, supervisor, or professor. Where did the disagreement originate? What did you say to the other person? What was his/her reaction? What was the outcome of the disagreement?

Coordinating/Leading Others

Tell me about a situation in which you had to coordinate several people to achieve a goal. What prompted you to take the lead? How did you go about coordinating and leading the group? How did they respond? What tools did you use to measure the progress of the group? What was the outcome?

Managing Stress

Describe your most disappointing experience. How did you cope with it? What did you do to move beyond it?

Technical Expertise

Tell me about a time you were effective in putting your technical expertise to use to solve a problem. What was the problem? In what ways did you draw upon your technical knowledge to solve it? What was the outcome?